

Commonwealth of Kentucky

CITIZEN FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD

Working for Kentucky's Future... Our Children



FY 2001 Annual Report

*Administrative Office of the Courts
Dependent Children's Services
Citizen Foster Care Review Board Program
Court Improvement Project
100 Millcreek Park
Frankfort, KY 40601*

Overview and Legislative Purpose



Children have many basic rights that need to be protected and preserved. These rights include, but are not limited to, food, clothing, and shelter; to be free from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; to develop physically, mentally, and emotionally to their potential; to be educated; and to have a safe, secure, and stable family. Unfortunately, the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) do not always protect and ensure these rights, thus removal of the child from the parent(s) or guardian(s) may be necessary. Subsequently the child may be ordered by the district court or family court to be placed in the custody and commitment of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children for placement in foster care. At the end of his or her episode in foster care a child may be returned to the home of removal, adopted, or placed permanently with a relative(s) or other guardian(s).

In the early 1980s, several child advocacy groups became involved in examining the length of time Kentucky's maltreated children were spending in foster care. They discovered that children were lingering in foster care; a phenomenon now known as foster care drift. As a result, in 1982 the Kentucky General Assembly passed legislation creating the Citizen Foster Care Review Boards. This legislation provided district court judges with the statutory power to appoint community volunteers to serve on review boards. Between 1982 and 1984, eleven review boards were created. There are currently over 140 local boards located in every judicial district in Kentucky.

Citizen Foster Care Review Boards have been mandated under KRS 620 to provide an in-depth case review of every child that is committed to the Cabinet for Families and Children. Case reviews must occur at least once every six months until the child is released from his or her commitment to the Cabinet for Families and Children and permanently placed. However, the standard is to review cases quarterly. Boards are required by statute to meet quarterly, however several local boards meet on a monthly basis. Findings and recommendations the board has for the judge assigned to the case are made and documented during each review. Boards may also document any observations or questions that they have for the social worker assigned to the case. Copies of reviews become part of the child's case file and are also used to gather data for statistics that are required to be presented in this report.

There are currently over 650 volunteers serving on over 140 boards throughout Kentucky. Each review board must consist of at least 3 volunteers. All volunteer reviewers must attend an initial training session to become certified. A minimum of six continuing training credit hours must be obtained annually by board members following their first year of service. Volunteers are recruited, trained, and provided continual support by the Administrative Office of the Courts in conjunction with other volunteers.



The Citizen Foster Care Review Board organization in its entirety consists of support staff from the Administrative Office of the Courts, auxiliary committees consisting of at least one staff person and numerous volunteers, 144 review boards, and the State Citizen Foster Care Review Board, which consists of all board chairpersons. A State Chairperson, vice chairperson, and an executive committee comprised of volunteer representatives from each of the eight judicial court regions, and Administrative Office of the Courts' staff provide program direction and support.

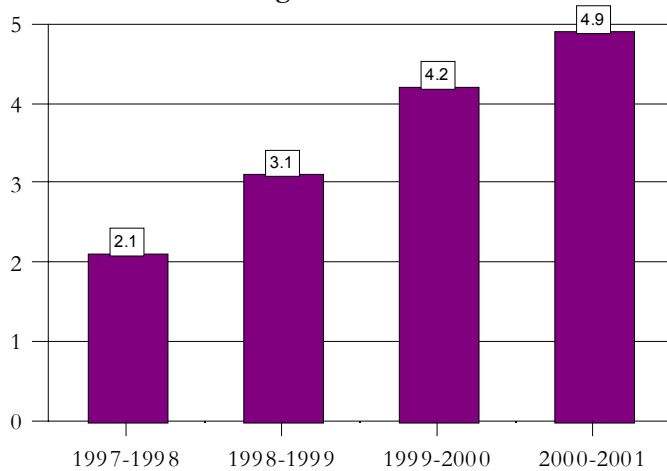
Other statutory duties of the Citizen Foster Care Review Board include:

- Establishing, approving, and providing training programs for local board members,
- Establishing reporting procedures to be followed by local boards and publish an annual written report compiling data reported by local boards including the following: how the needs of children are being met, the number of times children are moved and the reasons for moves, the average length of time in care, whether or not sibling visitation is occurring, and the total number and frequency of reviews,
- Evaluating and making annual recommendations to the Supreme Court, Governor, and the Legislative Research Commission regarding the laws of the commonwealth, practices, policies, and procedures within the commonwealth affecting permanence for children in out-of-home placement, and the investigation of allegations of abuse and neglect. The Citizen Foster Care Review Board must further present its effectiveness or lack thereof and reasons therefore of review of children in the custody of the cabinet.

The Volunteers

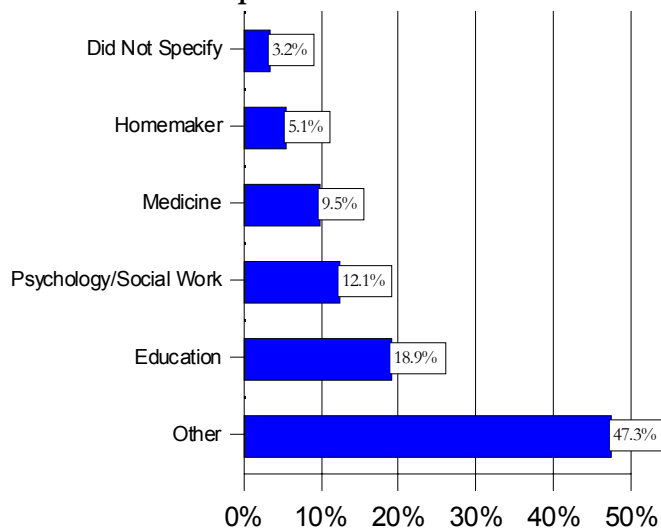
The Citizen Foster Care Review Board currently has a volunteer base of 683 individuals. Active volunteers have served an average of 4.2 years since being appointed. Two hundred and seventy-eight (41%) of our volunteers have served for over 5 years and 75 (11%) have served for over 10 years.

Average Years Served



Kentucky law requires that when practicable, at least two members of each review board should come from the professions of law, medicine, psychology, social work, and education. The occupation distribution for volunteers is as follows:

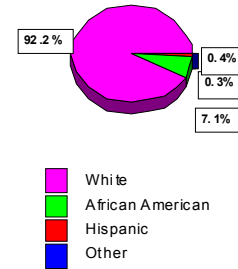
Occupation Distribution



The average age of CFCRB volunteers is 49 years old. Only 30 of our volunteers are age 30 or younger.

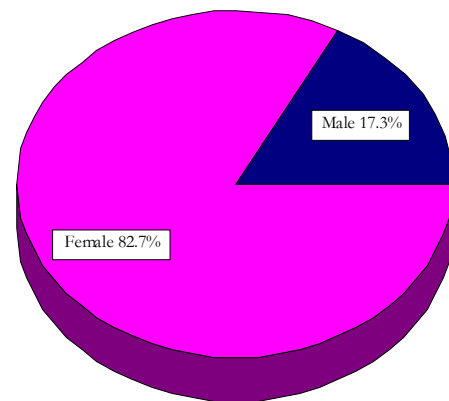
Race was reported for 576 of CFCRB active volunteers. Of those, 531 (92.2%) are white, 41 (7.1%) are African-American, 2 (.3%) are Hispanic, and 2 (.4%) are of other races.

Race of Volunteers



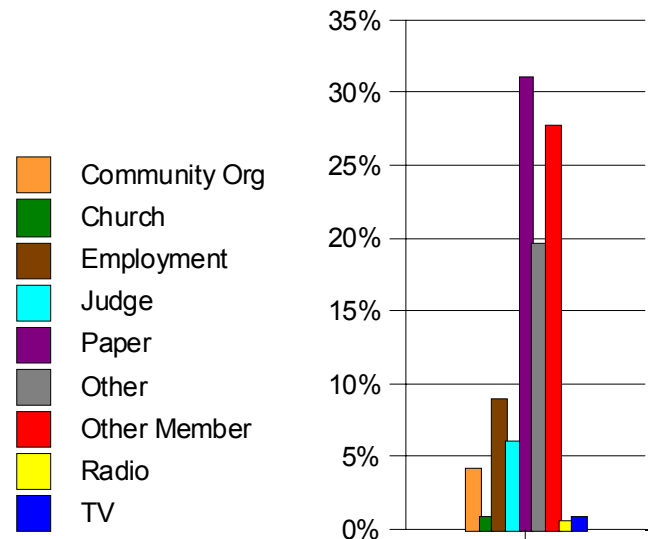
One hundred and eighteen (17.3%) of our volunteers are male and the remaining 565 (82.7%) are female.

Gender of Volunteers



Male Female

How Volunteers Hear about the CFCRB

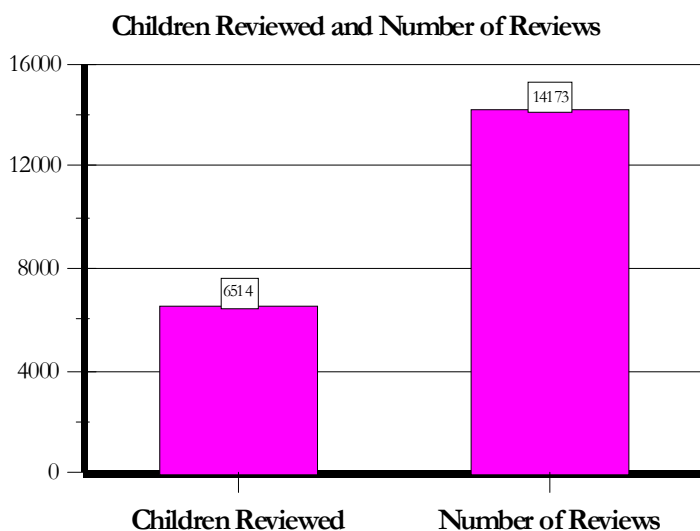


Board Activity

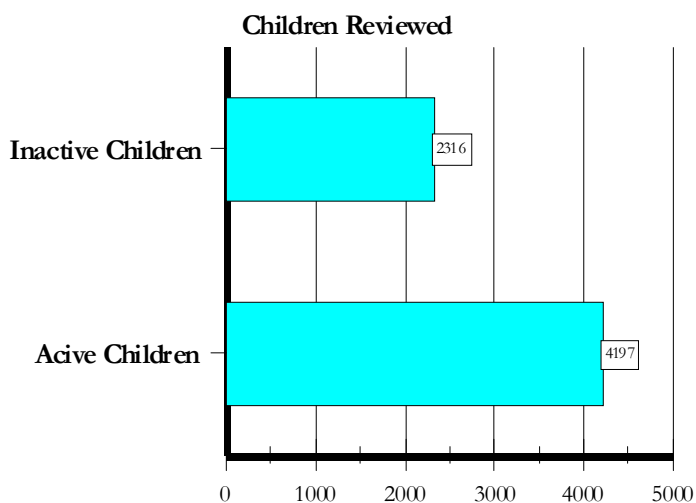
Kentucky statute requires that case reviews occur at least once every six months until the child is no longer in the custody of the cabinet or until an adoption proceeding becomes final. Reviews occur when:

1. Findings, recommendations, and comments pertaining to children in foster care are generated and provided to judges and the Cabinet for Families and Children, and/or
2. The status of a child in foster care or his or her file is determined and reported to the central office.

During the past fiscal year, the review boards conducted 14,173 reviews of 6,514 children. These two numbers suggest that children were reviewed an average of 2.2 times during the year.

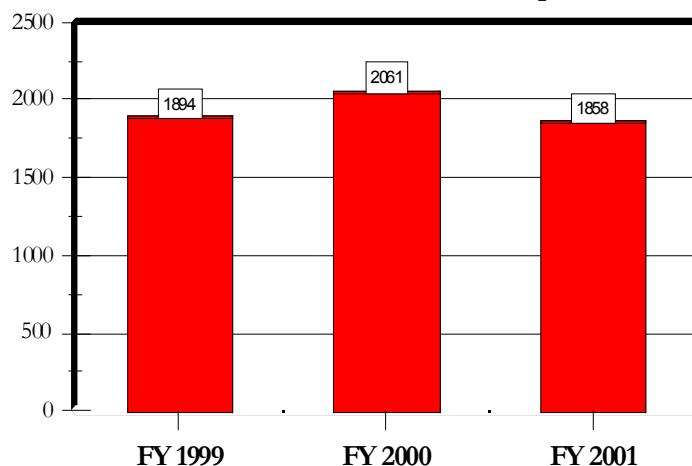


Over the past year a total of 2,316 children reviewed were released. The remaining 4,197 children reviewed were still actively in foster care as of August 15 of this year.



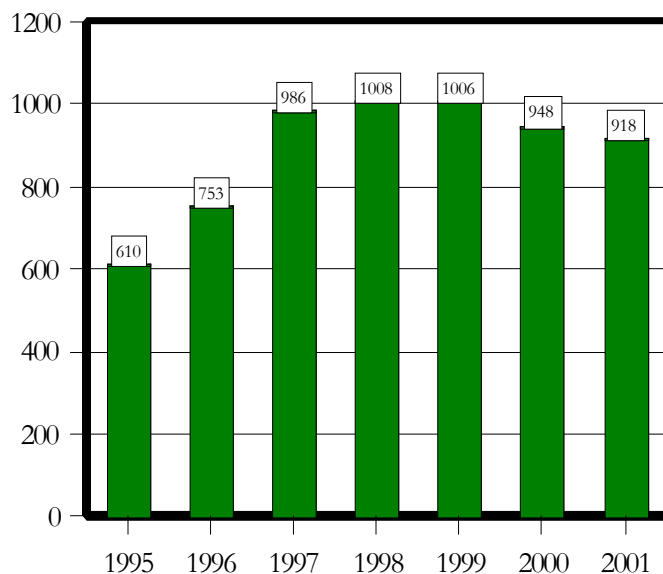
Unfortunately there are times when the files provided for the board to review at its meeting are not up to date or are not provided at all. Last fiscal year a total of 187 children's files were not available for review and the files of 1874 children provided for review were not up to date. This fiscal year a total of 206 children's files were not available for review and the files of 1,652 children provided for review were not up to date.

Children Whose Files Were Not Provided/Up To Date



Kentucky law requires that boards meet no less than four times annually. During the past fiscal year our 144 review boards reported a total of 918 board meetings to the central office. These two numbers indicate that there was an average of 6.4 meetings per board.

Number of Board Meetings

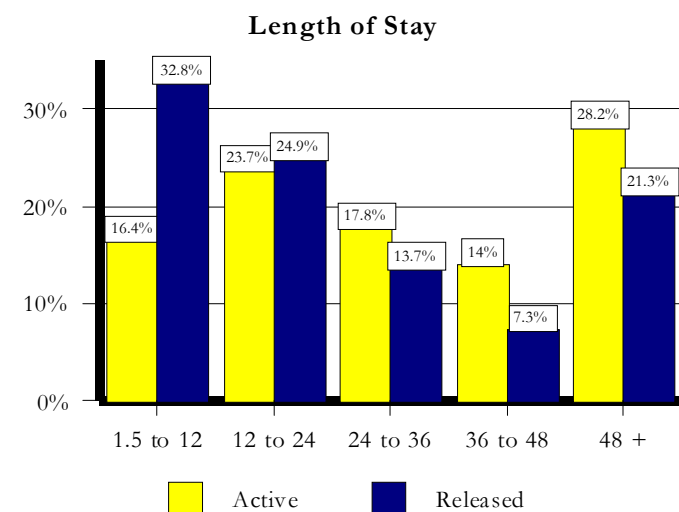
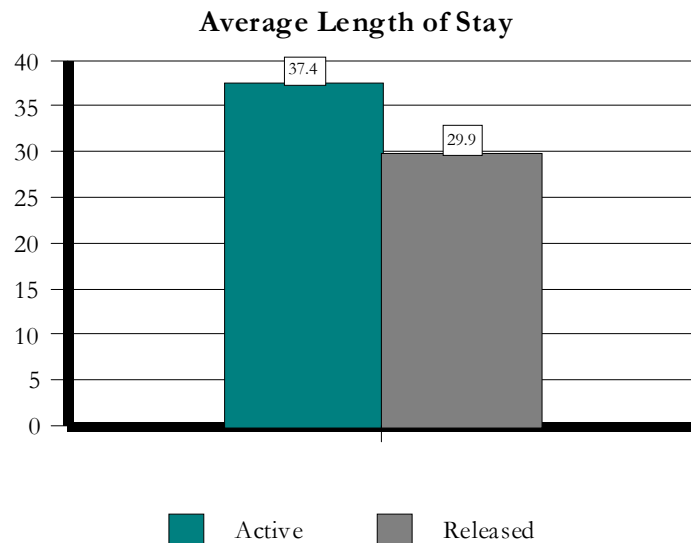


The Children We Reviewed

The following statistics are representative of all the children's whose cases reviewed by the CFCRBs during fiscal year 2001. Children excluded from the statistics include those who were in temporary custody for less than 45 days. These statistics will present: age, race, sex, length of stay, reasons for release, and number of placements for children reviewed. They will further detail the permanency plans of children reviewed and whether or not the volunteers agreed or disagreed with them.

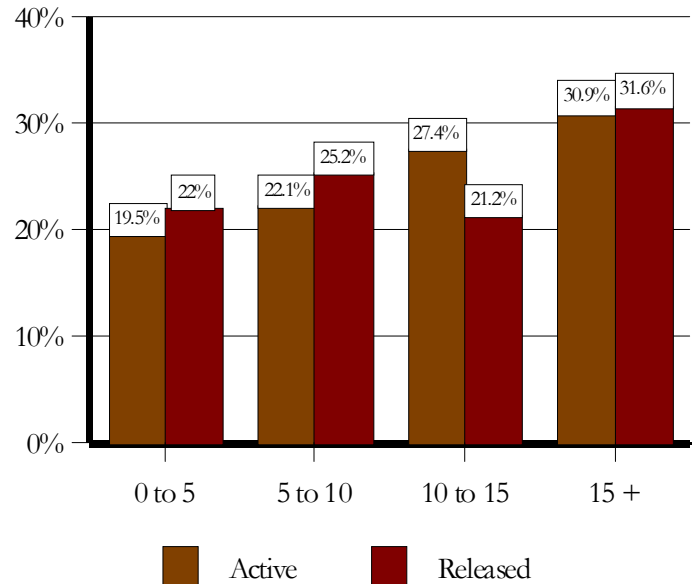
Children specified as "active" were currently in foster care on August 1 of this year and reviewed by the review boards at some point in time during the fiscal year. Length of stay for active children was calculated by using the date that children entered foster care and August 1, 2001. Length of stay for active and released children is reported in months.

Length of stay data was available for 4,106 of the active children and 1,251 of the released children.

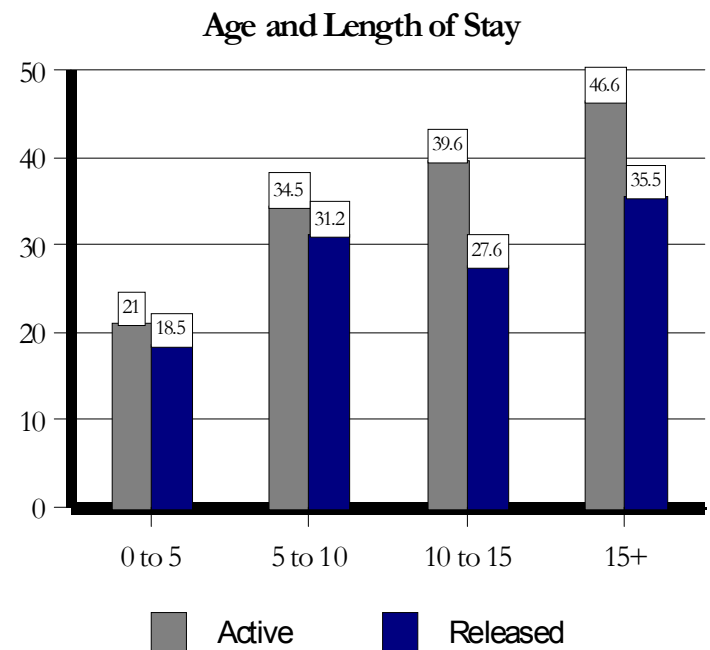


Dates of birth were available for 4,154 of the active children and 2,185 of the released children. The average age of active children is 11 years old and the average age of released children is 10.7 years old.

Age Distribution of All Children Reviewed

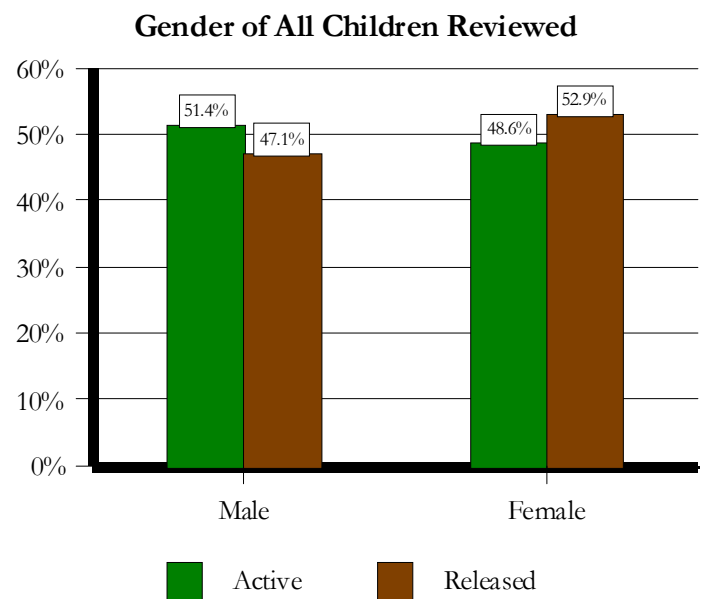
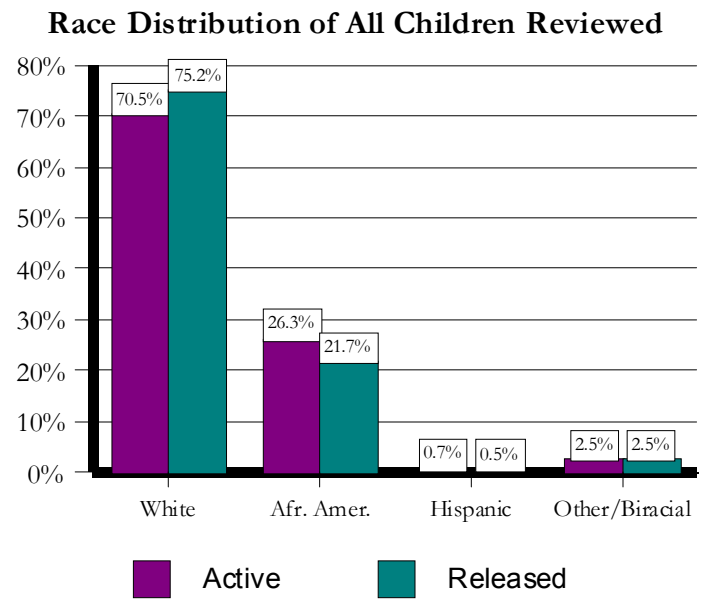


Dates of birth and length of stay data were available for 4,060 of the active children and 1,221 of the released children. As one might expect, length of stay increases with age.



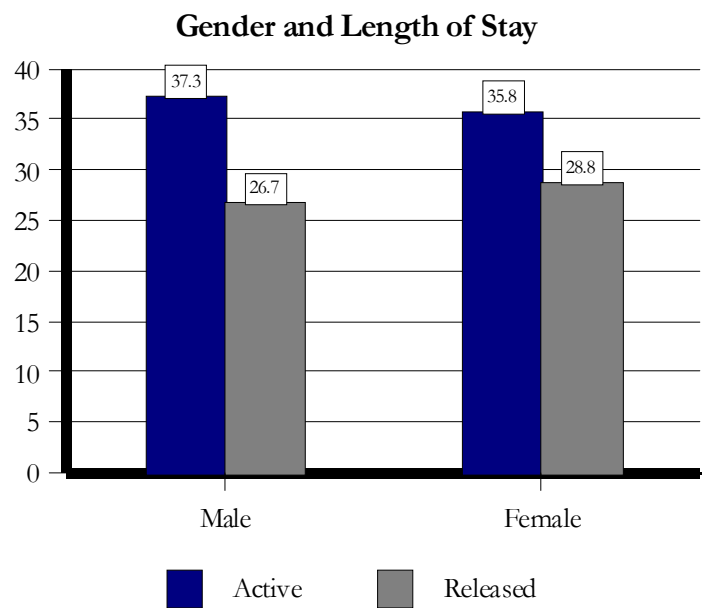
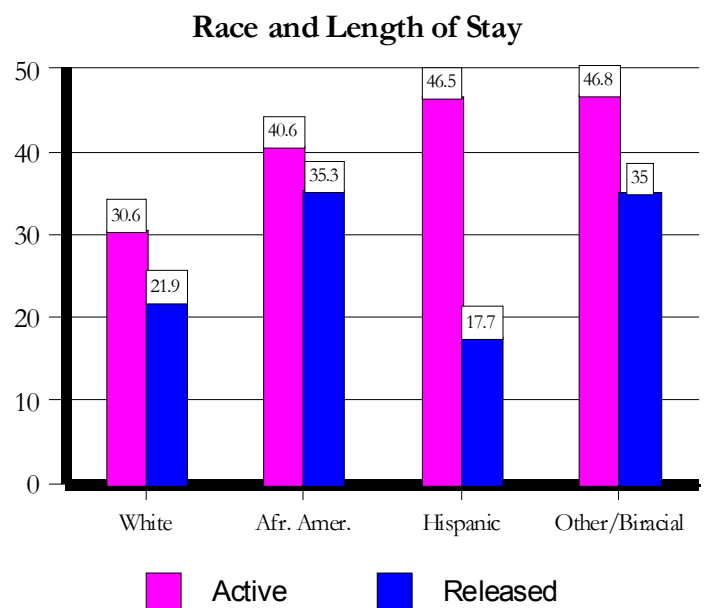
Race specification was available for 3,562 of the active children and 1,776 of the released children. As depicted below, African-American youth are disproportionately represented in Kentucky's foster care system. Only 9% of Kentucky's juvenile population is African-American.

Gender specification was available for all 4,197 active children and all 2,316 released children. Female and male youth are for the most part equally represented in the foster care population.

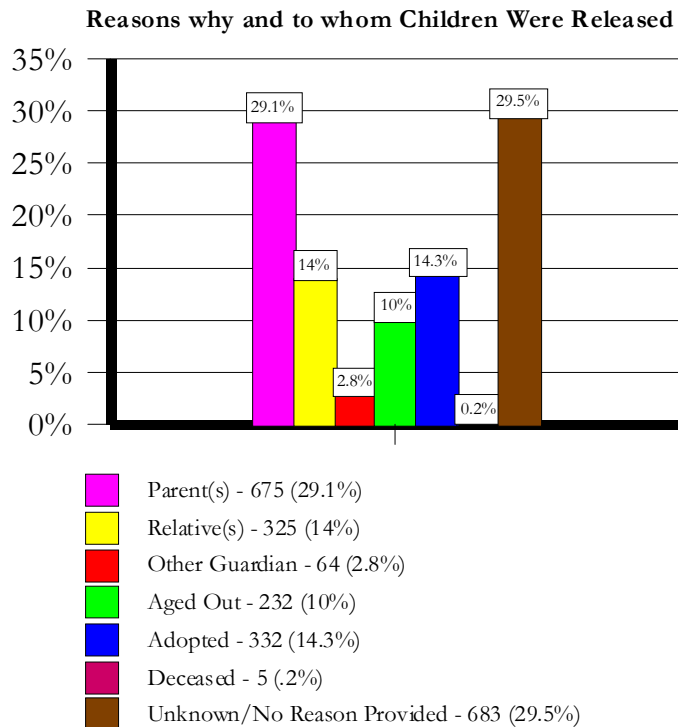


Race specification and length of stay data were available for 3,495 of the active children and 983 of the released children. According to the data, African-American youth are experiencing longer stays in foster care than white youth.

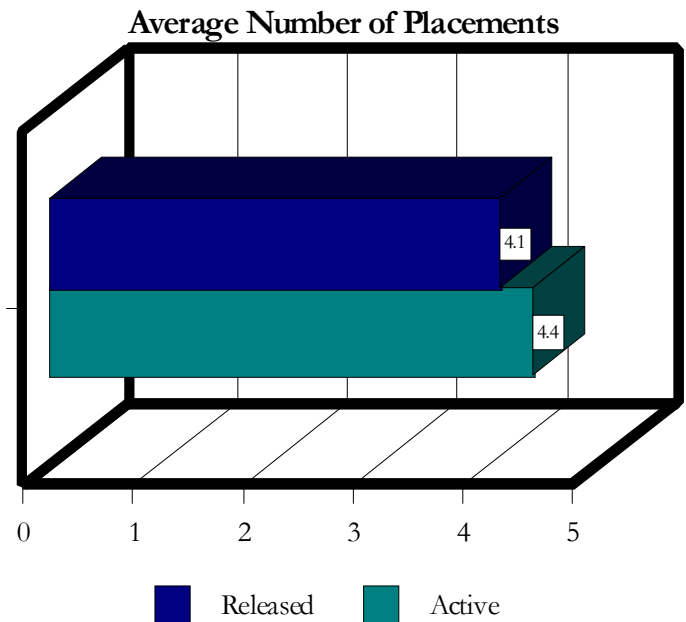
Gender specification and length of stay data were available for 4,106 of the active children and 1,251 of the released children. There are no significant differences in the length of stay for female and male youth.



A total of 2,316 of the children reviewed have been released. The following chart will detail to whom children were released to.



Placement data was available for 3,765 of the active children and 1,369 of the released children. Active children have experienced an average of 4.4 moves during their episodes in foster care while released children have experienced an average of 4.1 moves during their episodes in foster care.

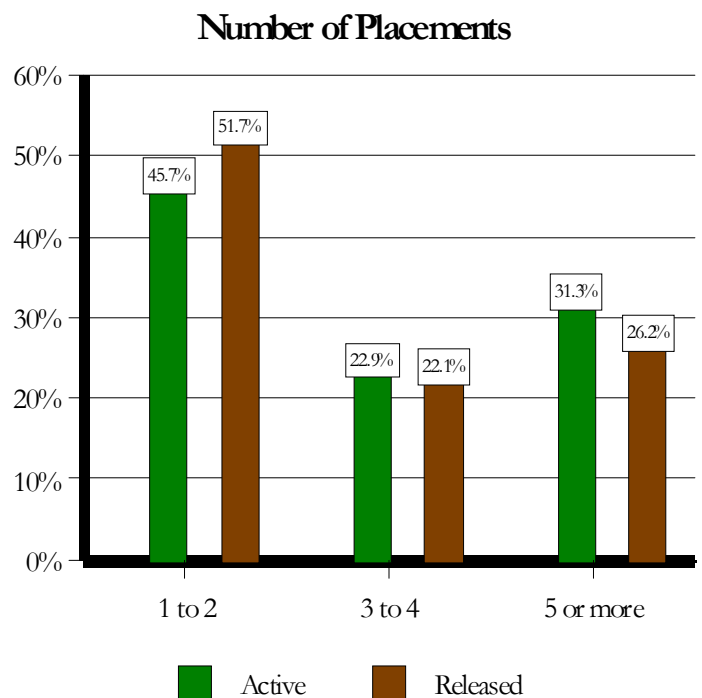


At least 332 of the released children reviewed by CFCRBs were adopted. Length of stay data was available for 259 of these children. The average length of time experienced by these children between entry into care and adoption was 50 months, or a little over four years.

Commitment types were available for 3,793 or the active children and 1,944 of the released children.

ACTIVE CHILDREN		
CASE TYPE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Abuse	435	11.5%
Neglect	1,185	31.2%
Dependency	1,620	42.7%
Abuse and Neglect	432	11.4%
Status	121	3.2%

RELEASED CHILDREN		
CASE TYPE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Abuse	211	10.9%
Neglect	678	34.9%
Dependency	688	35.4%
Abuse and Neglect	237	12.2%
Status	130	6.7%



Permanency plan data was available for 3,940 of the active children and 1,772 of the released children. The following charts will present the permanency plans for children reviewed and whether the volunteers agreed with them or not after reviewing the case.

Permanency Plan Abbreviations		
RTP	=	Return to Parent
ADP	=	Adoption
PRP	=	Permanent Relative Placement
PPLA	=	Planned Permanent Living Arrangement
LG	=	Legal Guardianship
EM	=	Emancipation

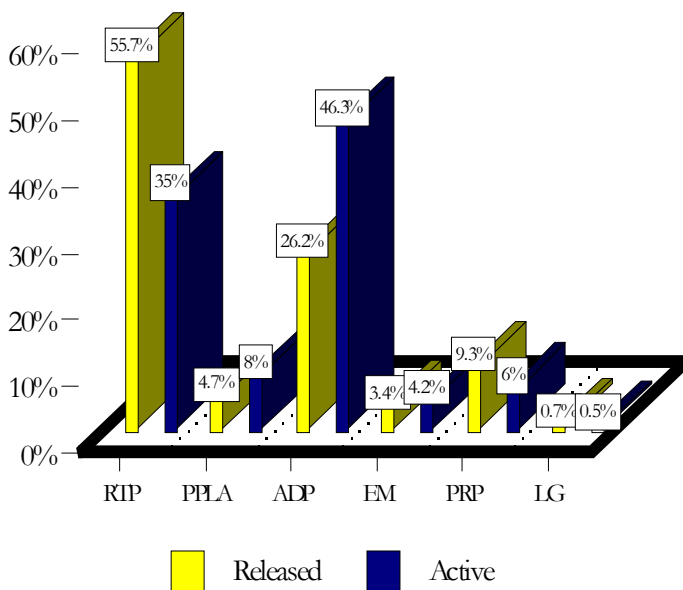
Volunteer Agreement and Disagreement with Permanency Plans - Inactive Children

Permanency Plan	Agree	Disagree
RTP	83.7%	16.3%
ADP	97%	3%
PRP	93.9%	6.1%
PPLA	96.4%	3.6%
LG	100%	0%
EM	96.7%	3.3%

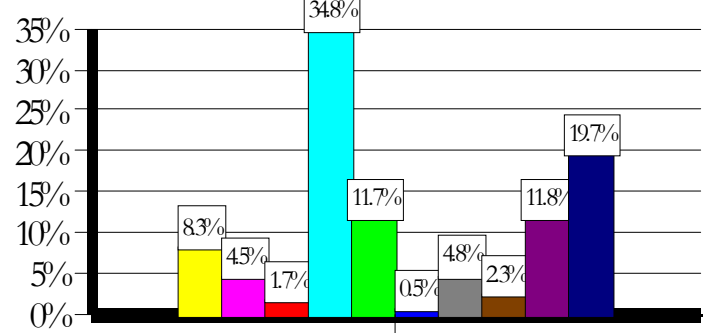
Statewide Sample Data

As reported by our volunteers, the following charts will present: reasons for removal, whether or not children have moved more than three times during a six month period, how the needs of children are being met, the reasons for moves, and whether or not sibling visitation is occurring. A sample pertaining to 2,145 of the children reviewed was used to report these items. Data was collected from 33% of the review boards' completed reviews.

Permanency Plans



Reasons for Removal

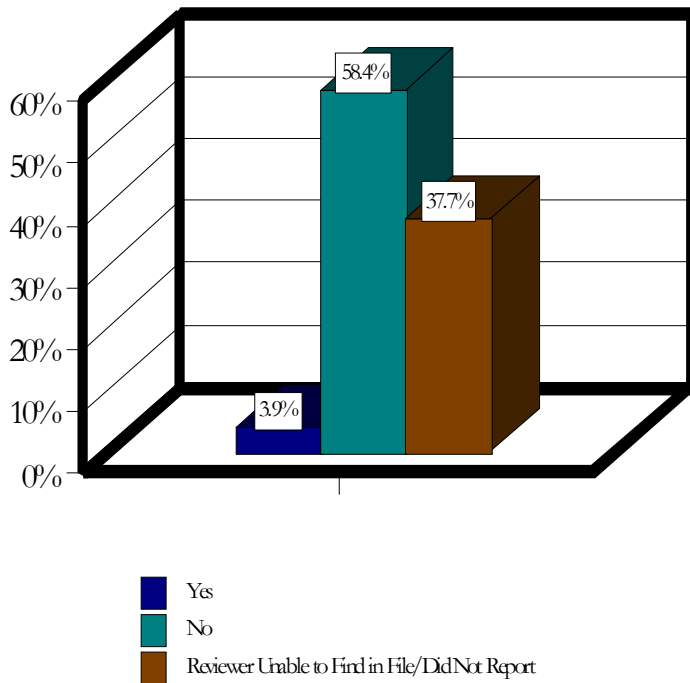


Volunteer Agreement and Disagreement with Permanency Plans - Active Children

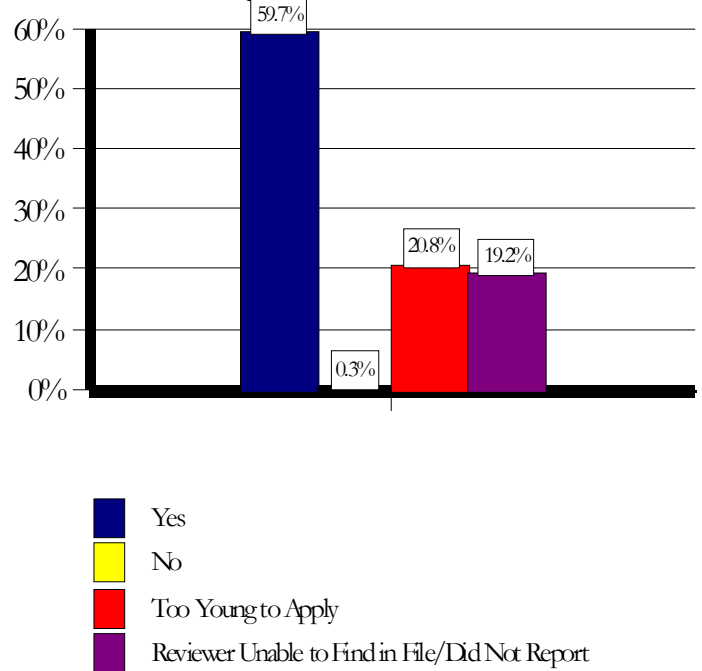
Permanency Plan	Agree	Disagree
RTP	77.4%	22.6%
ADP	95.9%	4.1%
PRP	85.1%	14.9%
PPLA	95.5%	4.5%
LG	100%	0%
EM	94.6%	5.4%



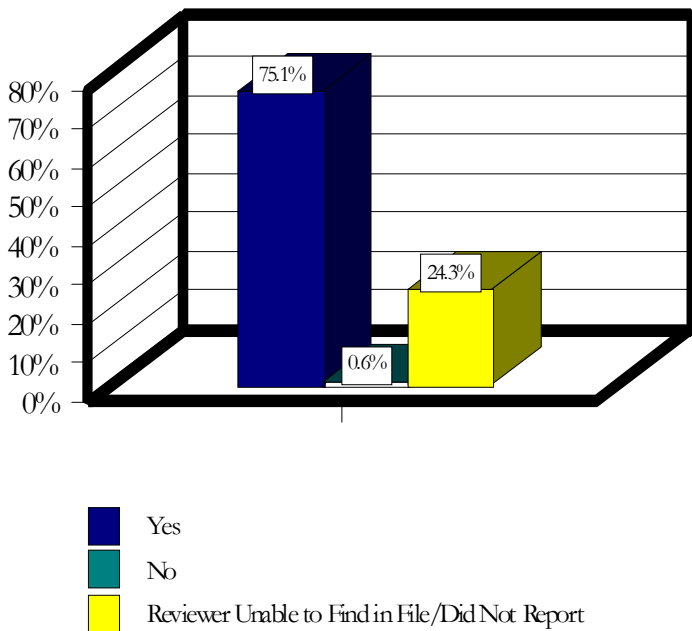
Moved More Than 3 Times During 6 Month Period



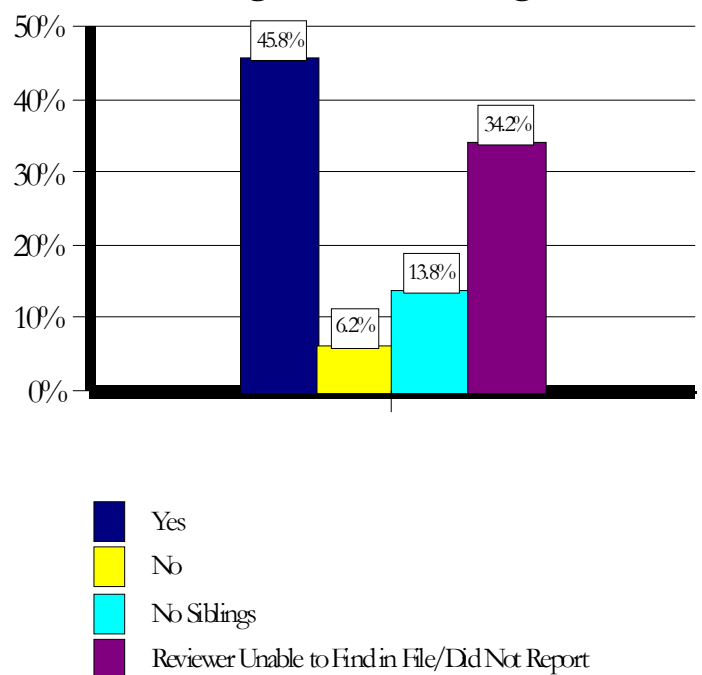
Child Receiving All Needed Educational Services



Child Receiving Necessary Physical Exams



Sibling Visitation Occurring



Accomplishments and Recommendations

It has been quite an eventful year for the Citizen Foster Care Review Boards. Volunteer committees have accomplished several feats during this past fiscal year and many volunteers have provided their insight into child welfare policy and practice. Additionally several program accomplishments have been made during this past fiscal year. These accomplishments and views are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Title IV-E Funding

In order to receive federal Title IV-E funding, reviews of children in foster care must be conducted by a neutral third party who is not affiliated with the social service agency. This year, through an agreement with between the Administrative Office of the Courts and the Cabinet for Families and Children, Citizen Foster Care Review Boards have succeeded in attaining federal Title IV-E funds for reviews. These funds have assisted the Administrative Office of the Courts in providing needed resources to the program and services to over 650 volunteers around the state.

Interested Party Reviews

The first interested party reviews with our volunteers have occurred in Jefferson, Knox, and Laurel Counties with the assistance of the federal Adoption Opportunities Grant. With the interested party review format, all parties, attorneys, foster parents, social workers, CASAs, and known treatment providers are invited to participate in these reviews. In these sites, where additional services have been provided to our volunteers, the length of stay for both adopted and non-adopted children in foster care has been reduced to 14 months. At the same time in these sites the average length of time between entry into care and adoption was 22 months. This is compared to a statewide average length of stay of 37 months and a statewide average length of stay for adopted children of 50 months. It is the goal of Dependent Children's Services to have interested party reviews being conducted on a continual basis for high-risk cases in each of our 7 coordinator regions next year.

Training

Each year trainings are held regionally at which newly appointed volunteers are trained in the following areas: history of CFCRBs, statutory and case law review, Cabinet for Families and Children procedures and policies, forms used in abuse, neglect, and dependency cases, roles and responsibilities of the reviewer, reviewing a case file, and other children's issues. During the past fiscal year over 140 newly appointed volunteers participated in these trainings around the state. Over the next year statewide schedule of volunteer training sessions will be posted training surveys will be distributed to every reviewer

in the state in order to assess training needs for volunteers. A on the web site and an alternative training library will be created in order to offer alternative training options for the more experienced reviewer.

Newsletters

Citizen Foster Care Review Board newsletters have been written and distributed quarterly over the past year. This publication offers a wealth of information on review board activity and children's issues. The purpose of the newsletter is to inform, challenge, and provide a collective focus on the needs of children in out-of-home care for citizen foster care reviewers and other advocates and service providers across Kentucky.

Web Site

Over the past year we have made several improvements to our web site. The CFCRB handbook, brochure, and past newsletters have been added to the web site. This report is also posted on the web site in a downloadable format.

Speaker's Bureau

A Speakers' Bureau was initiated during the past fiscal year. The purpose of this initiative is to recruit potential volunteers to become members of CFCRBs. A program script and program fact sheet, videos, brochures, and applications are provided to speakers to share with audiences. More than a dozen volunteers from across the state have agreed to serve as speakers.

Brochure and Handbook

The CFCRB brochure and handbook were updated over the past year. New information was incorporated into these documents as well as the addition of photos to make them more appealing.

Review Forms

The CFCRB review forms have been updated to reflect current statute and volunteer interests. Several items were added to the forms including: the number of social worker changes, the date of the most recent case plan, whether or not parents signed the case plan, and the date of the next permanency hearing.

Conference

In October of this year, our conference, Building Blocks for Kids will be held. Volunteers receive continual training hours for attending this conference. At this year's conference the issues and topics that will be addressed are as follows: 1) questions from new volunteers, 2) frustrations, issues, questions, and concerns, 3) permanency goals, 4) termination of parental rights, 5) the role of the Guardian ad litem, and 6) the permanency review hearing. Presentations will be conducted by Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky and other experts in child welfare.

Guardian Ad Litem Division Created

It is also worth noting that during the past year a Guardian ad litem (GAL) Coordinator was hired within Dependent Children's Services. A GAL is an attorney appointed by the court whose sole responsibility is to ensure that a child's interests are properly represented. The conflict of our adversarial system of justice, as well as a child's inability to make legal decisions for himself or herself, require the attention of the GAL. In 1998, Chief Justice Lambert established a commission to study and recommend improvements in the legal representation of children. One of the recommendations was to develop and implement a standard GAL training program, housed at AOC, and to work closely with the Kentucky Bar Association. Since the inception of this program, over 400 attorneys have been trained with a best practice model for abuse, neglect, and dependency cases.



Increased Collaboration in Data Sharing

The tracking system houses a wealth of information on children reviewed by the boards, including the statistics presented in this report. The tracking system and those who work with it coordinate, schedule, and keep track of board meetings and reviews.

Additionally, over the past year the content and quality of data has improved dramatically thanks to the assistance of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children. Our central office now has access to the cabinet's TWIST system in order to directly obtain information on children in out-of-home care. Case listings, emails, and spreadsheets provided by cabinet workers have assisted staff tremendously in keeping track of the children in foster care.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been provided by volunteers during the past year. They do not necessarily reflect the position of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

CFCRBs propose that Kentucky work to achieve permanent and stable homes for children by:

- Increasing the intent to release notification requirement from 14 days to 45 days. Require that, before a child is released, a signed court order must be sent to the CFCRB.
- Advocating for more timely processing of TPR cases. From identifying parental interests immediately (i.e. locating biological parents so all claims may be heard initially) to finalizing the presentation summary, the events associated with TPR need to be approached with the child's sense of time in mind.

- Expediting adoption following TPR, particularly when there is a stable family waiting to adopt the child.
- Promoting adequate funding to address staffing issues in the CFC. These monies could be used to hire, train, and retain social workers as well as para legals to assist with the TPR process.
- Working with the AOC to support the implementation of family courts and CASA programs in each judicial district/circuit, where possible.
- Collaborating with the AOC to facilitate more training on children's issues for judges, clerks, and GALs.
- Using the Permanency Plan as the guiding document in case files. Everyone involved in the process should look to this plan to determine what must be done to achieve permanency for the child. Other case documentation including the running record, case plan, and safety plan, just to name a few, should be weighed against the permanency plan.
- Supporting a consistent caseworker from commitment to release. The implication is that if there is one worker, the child should move more quickly to a permanent solution. Conversely, if there are a number of social workers on a case, months are lost in periods of worker transition. The CFCRB is now tracking the number of social workers on a case to determine if this is a valid concern.



“Citizen Foster Care Review Boards have been mandated under Kentucky Revised Statute 620 to provide an in depth case review of every child in foster care to help ensure that every child has an opportunity to have a safe and permanent home. Last year alone Citizen Foster Care Review Boards conducted over 14,000 reviews of 6,513 individual children. Volunteers have spent countless hours of their own personal time at over 900 board meetings. Through their reviews, Citizen Foster Care Review Board volunteers have made an invaluable contribution to their communities and provided safety, security, and stability for children across the Commonwealth.”



-Joseph E. Lambert, Chief Justice

Published by:
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Submitted pursuant to Kentucky Revised Statute 620.320